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## AN EVALUATION OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ENGLISH PROGRAM IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING ICT LITERACY

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### ABSTRACT

The unprecedented rate of technological developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has necessitated a change in every area of daily life including the way we work, learn and communicate. The rapid transformation in daily life has required people to be equipped with certain set off skills which are called as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy, being one of these skills, has gained the significant attention of not only the employers but also the educators. Since the main aim of education is to prepare individuals to the future by providing the necessary conditions, curricula have been revised by the Turkish Ministry of Education in 2017 in order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The purpose of this study is to analyze the revised 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program in order to detect to what extent the program serves the aim of developing learners' ICT literacy as one of the components of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The outcome statements and the coursebook activities have been analyzed within the scope of the study. The findings indicate that from 78 outcome statements only 6 (7%) outcome statements directly emphasize at developing learners' ICT literacy. Significant pedagogical implications are presented based on the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, ICT literacy, curriculum renewal, EFL.

## INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented rate of technological developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has necessitated a change in every area of daily life including the way we work, learn and communicate. Therefore, the skills and the competences individuals need for their daily life, careers and self-actualization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have changed. These changes require today's individuals to get equipped with a set of qualifications that allow them to fulfill the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands successfully. Having the responsibility of providing the citizens with the necessary conditions to prepare them to the future, governments need to take actions. As emphasized by Silva (2008:12) "integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into teaching and assessment is not only an economic imperative, driven by changes in the workforce, but a vital aspect of improving learning". Accordingly, there has been a curriculum renewal in Turkey with the aim of having the learners meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by integrating the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into the curricula (MoNE, 2017). The starting point of this study is the necessity of evaluating the revised curricula in terms of detecting the level of alignment between the theory and practice and it aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent do the outcome statements in the revised 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program develop ICT literacy?
- 2) To what extent do the 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL coursebook activities develop ICT literacy?

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

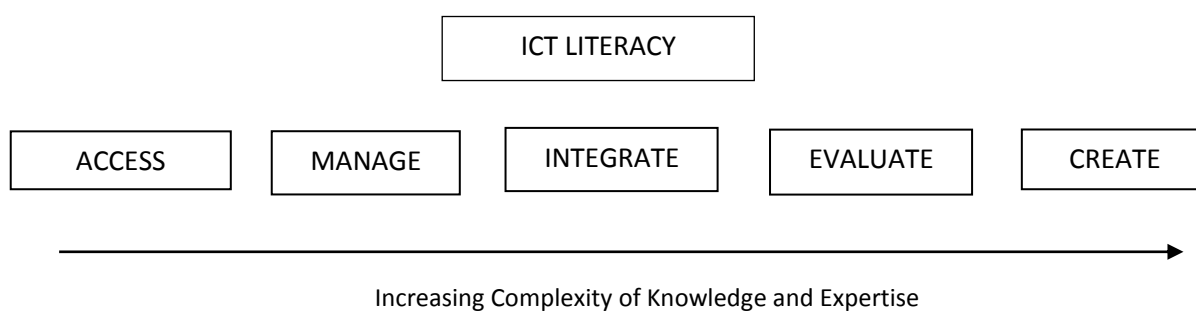
In a dynamic technological framework, there is a demand to focus on more than just the traditional basic skills (Crockett, et al., 2012). Students need to be equipped with the skills and competences required by the modern workforce. In this respect, three core skills have been determined as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills: (i) life and career skills, (ii) learning and innovation skills, (iii) information, media, and technology skills. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), each core skill identifies an area of competence people need to achieve. For instance; life and career skills describe the ability to be flexible, adaptable, self-directed and responsible while learning and innovation skills involve the ability to be communicative, innovative, collaborative and critical thinker. Lastly, information, media and technology skills include the ability to access and use information and technology, to create and analyze media products effectively. When incorporated into curriculum, instruction, and assessment, these skills facilitate the personal, social and intellectual development of learners (Lai & Viering, 2012). Therefore, the renewed curricula are supposed to teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in the context of main subjects. In other words, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills should be integrated into curricula by adopting an interdisciplinary attitude. In this regard, ICT literacy deserves special emphasis considering the irreplaceable role of technology in our lives.

### ICT Literacy

One of the most prominent features of 21<sup>st</sup> century is the value of information. Named as the era of information, 21<sup>st</sup> century requires people not only to reach the information in a way that is easier and faster but also to use the information more effectively. The advancements in technology make it possible for people

to reach and use the information in the most efficient way. Therefore, ICT literacy has become a requirement for people to survive in the era of information.

ICT literacy can be defined as the usage of digital technology, communication tools, and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society (Panel, 2002). This definition includes a continuum of skills and knowledge that are presented sequentially advising increasing complication as shown in Figure 1:



**Figure 1.**The Five Dimensions of ICT Literacy (Panel, 2002)

It is possible to apply these five components when performing almost any task related to ICT. For instance; opening up your mail box represents the first step of “access” while differentiating the mails that are related to your job from the ones that have been sent from your bank account corresponds to “manage” dimension. On the other hand, diversifying a pdf file by using interactive features matches the third level “integrate”. In “evaluate” dimension, decision is given about selecting the most applicable option to the nature of the task, and finally “create” dimension is related to creating something new such as a blog, web site, power point presentation or video by incorporating the previous dimensions.

### **ICT Literacy in Education**

Today, Internet and communication technologies have become an inseparable component of education. The studies show that ICT supplies conveniences for educators and their students to work in the direction of understanding technological competencies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Back, et al., 2009; King, 2002; Kitchenham, 2006; OECD, 2010). In that scope, governments have directed their attention to policy change depending on the acceptance that connection to technology is the key to achieving success (Rudd, et al., 2007). In this respect, transforming classrooms into smart contexts which involve technological gadgets has become a common practice. However, distributing tablets to the learners or equipping classrooms with techy devices does not guarantee digital competency. It is necessary that every aspect of education -from program design to instructional materials- involves digital competency. This necessity has been echoed by Larson and Miller (2011: 122) as it is of great importance for students to be able to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information through technology. Therefore, it is imperative for governments to design the

curricula in a way that would lead learners to access and use the information through technology. In other words, the major philosophy behind the curricula should reflect the mission of converting the learners into ICT literate individuals who are able to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information through technology. The starting point of this study is the necessity of ICT integration into the revised curricula and it aims to find out to what extent 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program facilitate the development of ICT literacy.

The review of literature on ICT literacy indicates that it is a trending research area lately. Researchers both in Turkey and abroad have been conducting studies in order to identify the variables that affect its structure, development and assessment. For instance, in their study, Zengin and Aksu (2017) aimed to present the trends in the educational technology studies in Turkey. They analyzed forty-seven resources including both articles and thesis dissertations. The findings show the three main themes on technology integration into foreign language teaching. These are: (i) student achievement, (ii) teacher training and (iii) student and teacher perceptions. Another research aims to measure ICT literacy level of high school students and to find out whether variables such as school type, gender, grade level, average school success and frequency of computer and Internet usage affect the level of ICT literacy (Soysal, et al., 2017). The findings indicate that there are no differences in terms of ICT literacy among males and females and different grade levels. However, there are significant differences in terms of ICT literacy among different school types. In 2018, a research was conducted with student teachers. The aim of the research was to track the development of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) of preservice English teachers through reflective and collaborative practices (Aşık, et al., 2018). Data were collected from 100 senior students through TPACK-EFL survey, peer reflective discussion form and focus group interviews. Students were expected to introduce digital tools and language websites to their peers for the research. Additionally, they integrated the selected materials into coursebooks. The findings revealed that there was a significant increase in the TPACK-EFL level of the students. Besides, learners reported positive perceptions about the integration of digital tools into language teaching. In 2006, a comprehensive study was conducted with seventeen school principals, fifteen computer coordinators and more than one hundred elementary education supervisors. The aim of the study was to identify the factors for integrating computer technologies into education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and surveys. Findings show that school principals' lack of technical knowledge, insufficient in-service training programs and lack of technical equipment are the main reasons behind the failure (Akbaba-Altun, 2006). Similar studies were conducted in abroad. For instance, the aim of an earlier study which was conducted in Australia was to develop an instrument for assessing the digital skills of tertiary students (Oliver & Towers, 2000). Having reviewed the literature, the researchers determined four key areas: These areas are: (i) an ability to independently operate personal computer systems, (ii) an ability to use software for preparing and presenting work, (iii) an ability to use the Internet and its various features as a communications device and (iv) an ability to access and use information from the web. The results of the survey show that tertiary students in Australia are highly skilled in digital technologies. Another study, which was conducted in Israel, shows the change in digital literacy skills of the participants from five different age groups. The study lasted for five years and the results indicate an improvement among all age groups but especially for the adults in the tasks that

require proficiency and technical knowledge. On the other hand, there has been a decrease in information and reproduction skills for the younger participants (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2009). In another study, the researchers aimed to find out teachers' perspective on incorporating digital literacy skills in instruction. The results of the focus group interviews indicate the efficacy of incorporating small scale exploratory practice into research projects (Allen & Berggren, 2016). Similarly, the participants of a recent study are 20 instructors from a South African University. Semi structured interviews have been conducted in order to find out how they develop digital literacy skills. Findings show that there are three factors which are effective in developing digital literacy. These are: (i) participation in training programs that encourage digital scholarship, (ii) personal investment of time and effort to learn about how to develop digital literacy and (iii) developing a career and identity management strategy that incorporates digital literacy (Chinyamurindi & Dlaza, 2018).

The current study has been conducted in order to evaluate 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program in terms of developing ICT literacy. It is a pioneering study since no previous research, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has evaluated the curricula and coursebook activities in terms of ICT integration. Therefore, this study has been conducted in order to fill the gap in the literature. The findings of the study are believed to provide insights to program developers, materials designers and teachers about ICT integration into language teaching. Moreover, the findings will indicate the efficiency of the revised 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL program for developing ICT literacy.

## **METHOD**

The aim of this study is to determine to what extent the outcome statements in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program and EFL coursebook activities reflect ICT literacy. Content analysis has been employed as a research technique under the framework of qualitative research method. Content analysis tries to explain the phenomenon by means of analyzing such documents as books, articles, reports, plans, policy documents and journals, and of reducing data into comprehensible pieces (Cohen, et al., 2007; Jupp, 2006). Documents are rich information sources which reflect the data to the researcher directly. As Labuschagne (2003) suggests, document analysis yields data –excerpts, quotations or entire passages- that are then organized into major themes, categories and case examples specifically through content analysis. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program and the 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL coursebook 'Teenwise' have been analyzed as the major documents for the current study.

9<sup>th</sup> grade English program has been revised in order to suit the needs and the requirements of the current century. In this vein, the program has been reshaped in terms of equipping the learners with (i) cognitive skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, (ii) social skills such as entrepreneurship, communicating effectively and thinking empathetically and (iii) personal skills such as autonomy, self-efficacy and leadership (MoNE, 2017). Moreover, the curricula have been revised in order to help develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as digital literacy, mathematical thinking, metacognition, foreign language speaking and more. Accordingly, the coursebooks have been redesigned so as to be in alignment with the revised curricula. In this respect,

'Teenwise' has been approved by the National Board of Education as the 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL coursebook for state secondary schools in Turkey. The coursebook adopts a thematic approach which includes 10 themes. Each theme has language activities for four skills together with grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation practice parts. All in all, 78 outcome statements and 216 coursebook activities have been analyzed, and the findings are presented in frequency and percentage levels.

## FINDINGS

### Findings for Research Question 1

- 1) To what extent do the outcome statements in the revised 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program develop ICT literacy of the students?

Findings for the first research question indicate that from the 78 outcome statements only 6 outcome statements directly emphasize at developing ICT literacy (7%). The outcome statements that include ICT literacy are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.**The Outcome Statements That Include ICT Literacy

Outcome Code	Outcome Statement
E9.1.W1.	Students will be able to write simple sentences and phrases (a postcard, an e-mail or a hotel registration form).
E9.3.R1.	Students will be able to scan film reviews on blogs to decide which movie to see.
E9.3.W1.	Students will be able to write their opinions on a blog.
E9.7.S2.	Students will be able to give a short simple presentation about an ancient civilization they have searched before.
E9.10.R1.	Students will be able to skim short and simple texts to draw a conclusion in terms of social media.
E9.10.W1.	Students will be able to write a comment on a topic via social media.

Findings show that from 6 outcome statements, 3 of them focus on improving the writing skill, 2 of them focus on improving the reading skill and only 1 of them focuses on improving the speaking skill. As indicated in Table 1, these outcome statements include direct reference to ICT literacy such as writing one's opinions on a blog or skimming a text in order to draw a conclusion about social media.

### Findings for Research Question 2

- 2) To what extent do the 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL coursebook activities develop ICT literacy of the students?

Findings for the second research question demonstrate that out of 216 activities in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade English coursebook only 16 activities help developing ICT literacy in learners (7%). Table 2 shows the frequency and the percentages of the activities.

**Table 2:** Frequency and the percentage of the coursebook activities

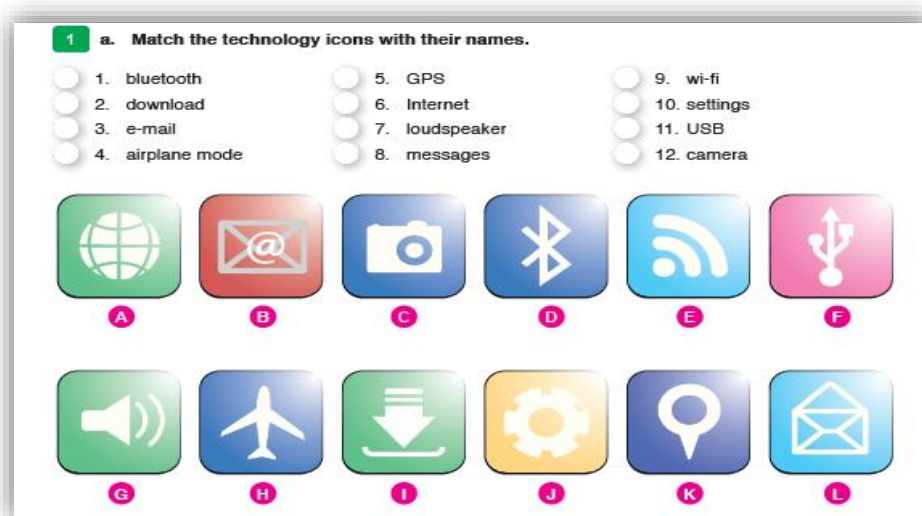
Language Skill / Area	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Writing	7	43.75
Reading	4	25
Speaking	3	18.75
Vocabulary	2	12.50
Total	16	100

Table 2 reveals that 7 out of 16 activities that aim to develop ICT literacy in learners are intended to improve writing skill (43, 75 %). These activities range from writing an e-mail to designing a web blog. Therefore, it can be claimed that writing activities differ in complexity in terms of the five components of ICT literacy.

Findings for reading activities show that 4 out of 16 activities that aim at developing ICT literacy are related to reading skill (25 %). These activities require the ability to read blog texts, online survey results and e-mails. Even though they are not as comprehensive as writing activities in terms of the complexity scale of ICT literacy, they are significant for involving digital components.

Table 2 also informs that 3 activities that aim to develop ICT literacy in learners serve the function of improving speaking skill (18, 75 %). They include making a presentation or discussions about how much time learners spend with social media. Thus, they also raise learners' awareness about social media and Internet addiction.

Vocabulary activities, on the other hand, constitute 12, 50 % of the activities with a focus on ICT literacy (n=2). Figure 2 is a screenshot from a vocabulary activity which requires matching the technological icons with their names. Since there is a high possibility of confronting with technological icons in almost every sphere of daily life, it can be claimed that vocabulary activities in the coursebook have a direct impact on developing ICT literacy.

**Figure 2:** Sample Vocabulary Activity in the Coursebook

**DISCUSSION and SUGGESTIONS**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century demands the explicit integration of ICT skills. The era in which we live requires learners to do research, communicate and collaborate through technology. Recently, governments have taken significant steps towards transforming learners into ICT literates. In this respect, there has been a curriculum revision in Turkey with the aim of equipping the learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. In this study, the integration of ICT literacy in 9<sup>th</sup> grade EFL teaching program and the coursebook has been analyzed. The findings reveal that only 7% of both the outcome statements and coursebook activities focus on developing ICT literacy and that they vary in complexity. Based on the findings of the study it is argued that the revised English program is unsatisfying in terms of developing ICT literacy. Similarly, previous research indicates that there are unsuccessful attempts in ICT integration into the curriculum (Bauer & Kenton, 2005). Researchers have put forward different explanations regarding this failure. Gülbahar (2007), who states that ICT integration into curriculum is a long and painful process, presents a detailed framework on technology planning. She proposes that several factors such as teacher training, availability of technical resources and encouragement of technology use must be taken into consideration for successful implementation. Besides, a continuous revision is necessary because of the rapid development of technologies (Czubaj, 2002). Akbaba-Altun (2006), on the other hand, states that teacher-related factors constitute another reason of failure. He claims that lack of in-service training and lack of technical knowledge are the leading reasons of failure in ICT integration. Therefore, it is suggested that pre-service and in-service teacher training programs be initiated all over the country. As Czubaj (2002) claims, for successful implementation of technology, planning should precede purchasing and training should precede implementation. In this respect, explicit integration of ICT tools and activities should be incorporated into tertiary level education since previous research indicate that explicit integration of ICT tools and activities into the learning process help develop learners' pedagogical and technological content knowledge (Aşık, et al., 2018; Ersanlı, 2016).

Considering the significance of ICT in language teaching (Kelly & Safford, 2009; Knowles, 2004:12), we argue that more activities and outcome statements which involve the components of ICT be incorporated into the curriculum. The benefits of integrating ICT literacy into English curriculum are twofold: First, the development of four skills is emphasized as a natural objective of any curriculum. What makes it advantageous is the integration of ICT literacy into the four skills and themes. Thus, learners develop both their skimming and scanning strategies along with raising their awareness about the efficient use of social media as in the case of the outcome statement E9.10.R1 in Table 1.

The findings of this study are limited to the analysis of the outcome statements in 9<sup>th</sup> grade English program and the coursebook activities. Further research may focus on other grade levels or EFL classes may be observed in order to determine to what extent web 2.0. tools are incorporated into instruction and to what extent they are effective in developing ICT. Moreover, teacher training is another dimension of ICT literacy in education. In this vein, research may be conducted for determining the ICT literacy level and the needs of the teachers.



Based on the needs analysis, governments may implement teacher training programs. To conclude, ICT literacy is a requirement of the current century. Therefore, schools in general and EFL classrooms in particular need to equip students with practices for developing the components of ICT literacy such as accessing the sources, managing them, integrating them into their learning process, evaluating them in terms of accuracy, practicality, reliability, suitability and creating a new product through utilizing different web sources.

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